

March 2, 2015

Dear Senator Bye, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee,

Please accept this written testimony as a **request for your support for Bill 6824 for the support of local Early Childhood Councils**. These councils reach thousands of families across Connecticut, working in a multitude of ways to support parents, communities and preparing children for school. Restoring the funding will allow the incredible work to continue and benefit communities for years to come.

The local Early Childhood Council in Colchester has developed a plan for ensuring Healthy, Happy and Successful children in our community, which is crucial for the long term development of our youth. Through parenting workshops, Play & Learn groups and special events, the Early Childhood Council of Colchester is actively identifying the needs of families with young children and providing the programs to meet those needs.

As a mother of three children ages 7, 4 and 2, our family moved to Colchester four years ago and since then I have benefitted from the work of this dynamic council. My first interaction with the Early Childhood Council in Colchester was at the Preschool Expo event in 2011, when we were considering moving to town. I was able to attend this free event to learn about the preschools and services offered for families with young children and the experience sold me on the town. It was the perfect opportunity to find the resources we needed and connect with services all in one location. **This annual event provides critical support for parents engaging preschool decisions for the first time.**

The Early Childhood Council of Colchester offers several Play & Learn groups which focus on children in their infant, toddler and preschool years. Some of the groups I have participated in include Baby Sign Language, Music for Mommy & Me, Power Play, and Family Yoga. Each of these nurturing and enriching programs helped me to connect with my children in ways I did not think were possible and encouraged me to build relationships with other parents in the community. The friendships that my children and I have made have been crucial to our success in adapting to our community. **A network of support is essential for young families.** As a mother, I have improved the ways I communicate with my children and support their changing needs. I have learned how sign language supports my toddler's language and reasoning skills, and that it helps her express her needs. I have learned how breathing and movement helps my four year old from becoming overwhelmed in sensory stimulating situations. And, I have seen how music is a wonderfully bonding and positive experience to share with my children. These types of programs are not offered anywhere else in Colchester and by providing them free of charge, families are able to take advantage of the incredible benefits. **Parents are empowered when they have the necessary support and resources and their children thrive.**

Another important way, that the Early Childhood Council in Colchester has helped me, is through the Parenting Series Workshops. My husband and I attended this Relationship Based Parenting Course over several weeks. The logistics of getting to an evening event with both parents and three children during the week is almost impossible; however, the council smartly arranged for childcare and dinner. **There is**

a great understanding of what families need and the community plan supports those needs. In a survey of parents, who attended these workshops in the 2013-2014 school year, 100% responded that they were overall excellent or good. In addition, 86% of parents stated that they would change an action or attitude of theirs as a result of their participation. **As parents, we are our child's first teacher and early childhood councils are providing valuable tools and information for parents to do our best.**

The work of local Early Childhood Councils benefits the community in many ways. Children are better prepared for kindergarten and more successful managing their emotions. The percentage of children entering Kindergarten in Colchester with early reading skills increased from 48% in 2008 to 73% in 2013. In addition, scores for early math skills for children entering Kindergarten have increased from 50% in 2009 to 73% in 2014. **These statistics show that the work of local Early Childhood Councils is effective and valuable to families, the community and the school system.**

I am so grateful for the experiences, knowledge and growth I have obtained by participating in the programs, workshops and special events offered by the Early Childhood Council in Colchester. There are hundreds of families in Colchester that share this sentiment. I believe strongly in the value of these programs.

I am asking that the **funding be restored for the Community Plans for Early Childhood (\$750,000) and Improving Early Literacy (\$150,000).** Private funders will match this money and so the benefit is doubled. Without state resources those private matching dollars are lost! Although I speak on behalf of Colchester, there are forty-one communities across the state that benefit from this funding. This is an extremely smart investment in the families and children of Connecticut.

Thank you for your consideration on this important matter.

Sincerely,

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